MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, February 19th, 2026
10:00 AM Business Session
MDWFP Headquarters
1505 Eastover Drive
Jackson, MS 39211

BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Gary Rhoads, Vice-Chairman Billy Mounger, Commissioner Drew St. John were in attendance. Commissioners Colin Maloney and Todd Hairston attended via teleconference.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Executive Director Lynn Posey, Curtis Thornhill, Scottie Jones, Col. Jerry Carter, Russ Walsh, Amy Blaylock, Jerry Brown, Brian Ferguson, Andre' Hollis, and Drew Malone (General Counsel).

The Chairman gaveled the meeting to order and welcomed all guests and attendees, both in person and via livestream.

OPENING PRAYER

Chairman Rhoads requested that Russ Walsh, Director of Conservation Policies, open the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

Chairman Rhoads asked the Commission to review the minutes of the previous meeting and when done, he called for a motion to approve the minutes.

ACTION: Upon motion to approve by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner St. John, the Commission meeting minutes of January 15th, 2026, were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

The Chairman asked Executive Director, Lynn Posey, if there were any changes to the proposed agenda. Mr. Posey stated there are three people that need to be added for public comments, Mr. Robert Abbot, Mr. Mike Rouse, and Mr. Alan Mumbower. There is no need for an executive session.

Action: Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner St. John, the Commission unanimously approved of the meeting agenda for February 19th, 2026.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Robert Abbott, a 72-year-old hunter from Flora, Mississippi, thanked the Commission for creating senior hunts on state WMAs but expressed concern that the number of hunters drawn for the Mahannah WMA had been reduced from 125 to 50. He argued that safety and herd health data do not justify such a low number on roughly 30,000 acres—pointing out that even if all ~300 applicants were drawn, each hunter would still have about 100 acres. Abbott questioned using only a percentage of applications to set draw numbers, especially when seniors have limited remaining years to participate and CWD monitoring benefits from concentrated sampling in core areas. He asked the Commission to improve seniors' odds by adding an additional two-day hunt in mid-December and increasing the draw to 100 hunters for both the December and January senior hunts at Mahannah.

Mr. Mike Rouse echoed Mr. Abbott's concerns, supporting expanded opportunities for senior hunts on WMAs. He urged the Commission to add more WMAs to the senior-hunt list (naming areas like Twin Oaks, Charles Ray Nix, and Riverfront) and to schedule hunts at better times in the season, noting that the current Mahannah hunt falls at the very end when many seniors are "hunted out" or no longer participating. Rouse stressed that seniors have limited years left to take advantage of these opportunities, citing health issues and even mortality as barriers to ever drawing a hunt under current odds.

Mr. Alan Mumbower, a former department biologist and now chairman of the Private Landowners Mississippi high-fence enclosure organization, said he represents roughly 80–100 high-fence enclosures across the state. He explained that the group is working to improve public perception, communication, and relationships with MDWFP while also supporting stricter enforcement on non-compliant enclosures, noting that about 30% currently do not test or follow CWD regulations. He stated that Mississippi is the only nearby state (unlike Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Arkansas) that does not allow deer to be moved from one high-fence enclosure to another. In Alabama, deer can only be moved from breeding pens into an enclosure, not from enclosure to enclosure. He asked the Commission to consider lifting the 2018 moratorium so that tightly controlled, case-by-case transport permits could be issued for moving white-tailed deer between enclosures. The stated goal is to improve herd management and genetics within high-fence systems while still protecting against the spread of CWD.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Lynn Posey, Executive Director, presented the License Sales Report for January 2026.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

Resident license sales - $5,589,189.40 (down 1.21%)
Non-resident license sales - $9,576,762.00 (down 3.64%)
Other license sales - $93,874.00 (up 2.83%)
Lifetime license sales - $616,000.00 (up 7.69%)

Mr. Posey pointed out 2737 new turkey stamps have been sold as of January 2026 and emphasized all the money that comes in will be spent on improving turkey habitat and research.

PARKS

Brian Ferguson, Chief of Staff, explained that a recent ice storm impacted about nine state parks, with four still closed due to ongoing power and water issues and safety concerns. So far, roughly 250 bookings have been canceled, resulting in about $150,000 in lost revenue, and the department is intentionally avoiding competing with schools and hospitals for repair resources. Five affected parks have already reopened, and cabins at Percy Quin and the campground at Clarkco are expected to open by the end of the month, with grand openings planned for March. Looking ahead, they plan additional renovations at several parks, including J.P. Coleman, Percy Quin, Lake Lincoln, and either Wall Doxey or Tishomingo, depending on available capital funds.

Mr. Ferguson, reported on visitation and revenue for state parks from 07/01/2025-1/31/2026

Total Visitors- 402,000
Total Occupancy- 101,000
Total Revenue- $5,9210,000

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Col. Jerry Carter reported that for January 2026, law enforcement issued a range of citations, with the top five violations being: No Hunting License (169), Violation of WMA Regulations (153), Hunting from a Public Road (115), Unlawful Possession (82), and Trespassing (78). He also highlighted several notable cases, including the removal of a pet alligator named "Ralph" from a residence in Greene County, and multiple wildlife cases involving illegal ducks, deer, and another alligator where none of the subjects had licenses. Officers also used K-9 units: K-9 Charlie successfully tracked a blood trail and located an unlawfully taken deer in Monroe County, and K-9 Dempsey located two unlawful hunters during an archery hunt on Twin Oaks WMA.

Colonel Carter further reported that conservation officers assisted extensively with storm response, especially in the northern part of the state, including security at storm shelters where officers also provided life-saving medical aid in a few emergencies. In another incident on the Buttahatchee River in Lowndes County, officers worked with fire and rescue personnel to evacuate three residents trapped by floodwaters. He also noted law enforcement's outreach and education efforts, such as career-day appearances at local schools and representation at the NWTF Turkey Officer of the Year banquet, where Mississippi's Corporal Bush was recognized.

Customer counts for the department's shooting ranges for January 2026 were:
McIvor – 299 (515 in January 2025)
Turcotte – 478 (973 in January 2025)
McHenry – 700 (914 in January 2025)

Col. Carter added that the division is actively hiring, aiming for a new class of 20–25 cadets.

WILDLIFE

Amy Blaylock recognized outstanding staff contributions over the past year. She explained that awards are based on peer and supervisor nominations, reflecting how staff view each other's performance. Will Thompson of Canemount WMA received the WMA Conservationist of the Year award for consistently going above and beyond to keep the area in excellent condition and make the public feel welcome. William McKinley, with the agency since 2001 and now Deer Program Coordinator, was honored as Wildlife Conservationist of the Year for his long-standing leadership in deer management and his nationally recognized expertise on CWD. A new Director's Award was created this year and given to Nathan Blount for his critical role in implementing the new PayIt system for draw hunts, game check, and special permits, with Amy noting she could not have navigated that transition without his work.

NEXT MEETING

Date: March 25th, 2026
Location: MDWFP Headquarters
Time: 10:00AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Chairman Rhoads called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Mounger made the motion to adjourn which was seconded by Commissioner St John. The motion passed unanimously. Chairman Rhoads gaveled the meeting into adjournment.

Gary Rhoads

Gary Rhoads, CHAIRMAN

3/25/2026

Date

Billy M. Mounger II

Billy Mounger, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date